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## THE PHILOSOPHY OF PERSECUTION.

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IN the first series of his admirable essays on contemporary literature, M. Scherer reminds us that in 1841 Lacordaire wrote a biography of Saint Dominic, in order to prove that he was not the founder of the Inquisition. "Strange are the vicissitudes of opinion," observes the critic. "The Bollandists saw a title of honor where the modern Dominican sees a blemish which he would fain wipe away. While the former scornfully asked what there is criminal or shameful in delivering heretics to the torture, Lacordaire complains of the calumnies which have injured, in the eyes of posterity, the reputation of the chief of his order."\* The case is indeed a striking one; but the vicissitudes of opinion which it illustrates are in no way temporary or accidental, but are symptomatic of a general and progressive change in the tempers and opinions of civilized men. The interval of a century or more between the earlier Bollandists and Lacordaire marked a new era in this change of temper, in so far as persecution, while losing much of its old cruel intensity, became also discredited and disavowed. It was during this interval that Lessing's theory of the relative truth of opinions, which destroyed the logical basis of persecution, began to make its way among cultivated minds. Though the persecuting spirit has not yet ceased to influence men's actions, it is no longer regarded as a trait to be proud of, but seeks to hide itself under specious disguises. Its manifestations, too, have become correspondingly feeble. The heretic

\* "Études sur la littérature contemporaine," i. 159.

who once would have been racked, thumb-screwed, and burned for writing an obnoxious life of Jesus, is now only requested to resign his professorship in the Collège de France, while nobody thinks of such a thing as confiscating the book or cutting off from the author his share of the proceeds of its immense sale. The decline of persecution is in these respects analagous to the simultaneous decline in the warlike spirit. Warfare, once regarded as the only fitting occupation for well-bred men, has come to be regarded not only as an intolerable nuisance, but even as a criminal business, save when justified on the ground of self-defense. And along with this change in the moral estimate of warfare, we observe that whereas the capture of a town not long ago was invariably followed by a carnival of red-handed slaughter and bestial lust, it is now thought unfair to kill the pigs or chickens of a non-combatant enemy without at least professing to pay for them. These phenomena are happy symptoms of a general improvement in the way men think and feel; and they give one some reason for hoping that in due course of time such ugly things as war and persecution will cease to be numbered among the actual difficulties which beset human life.

This general improvement in opinion and temper, when stated with proper limitations as to time and place, is admitted by every one; and it has become an interesting task to analyze it and determine the various circumstances to which it is due. How does it happen that while the representatives of the current orthodoxy would once have roasted you with pious exultation, they are now fain to content themselves with turning you out of an office, and with an apologetic air at that?

This question was incidentally treated by the late Mr. Buckle, in the book which, twenty years ago, was so stimulating and instructive to youthful minds. Mr. Buckle laid it down as one of the cardinal points of his theory of history that civilized men have not improved morally but only intellectually. That on the whole civilized men manage to live in a more peaceable and becoming manner than barbarians, he did not deny; but he thought it necessary for the general purposes of his theory to maintain that this progress has been due entirely to increase in knowledge, and not at all to improvement in ethical feeling. His principal argument in support of this thesis is taken from the history of persecution. He calls attention to the curious circumstance that, in the early struggle between Christianity and

Paganism, it was not the infamous Commodus and Elagabalus, but the pure and upright Marcus and Julian who persecuted the new religion. And so, in modern times, many of the fiercest persecutors have been distinguished for integrity of character and elevation of purpose,—as St. Dominic, Isabella of Castile, Pius II., Calvin, and Catinat. Mr. Buckle accordingly argues that religious persecution has been the product of some of the best impulses of human nature when guided by an erroneous theory of duty. The wretched Commodus cared nothing for religion or for anything else save his sensual pleasures; and so Christian and Pagan were all one to him. But his noble father, Marcus, had the interests of religion uppermost in his heart; and so, in spite of his humane disposition, he felt it necessary to use violent means in putting down such an aggressive heresy as Christianity was then regarded. So, in later times, when persecution was prevalent among Christian sects, the general rule was that those who believed in the dogma of exclusive salvation were persecutors, no matter to what sect they belonged. Of this belief, persecution is, no doubt, under any circumstances, the natural outcome. He who believes that his neighbor's heresy is destined to be punished after death by excruciating tortures of infinite duration, will not scruple to use the most violent means for rescuing him from his perilous condition. Obviously, such a conclusion may be entertained without sophistry. Once admit that salvation is possible only within the limits of your own sect, and it may well be argued that you are bound, in benevolence if not in justice, to compel all dissenters to "enter in" to that sect. If persecution be needful to obtain such an object, then, on this view of the case, it would really be hard-hearted to refrain from using it. If pulleys and thumb-screws can substitute eternal happiness for future torments like those described by Dante, then pulleys and thumb-screws are instruments of charity and kindness. On this view of the case, the typical religious persecutor is a man in whom unselfish philanthropy has become such an uncontrollable impulse that, no matter how great the violence to his natural feelings of humanity, he will not hesitate to employ the most rigorous and appalling measures to restrain his fellow-creatures from incurring the risk of endless misery. Such men exist to-day, as formerly, mankind having remained substantially unchanged in their moral condition. But they no longer use such rigorous and appalling means of constraining the opinions

of their fellow-creatures, because—for one thing—they have not the power to do so. And they have lost the power to do so, because such a general skepticism has come to pervade the community that the dogma of exclusive salvation has become discredited. The decline of persecution has therefore been determined solely by intellectual causes, and does not indicate any improvement in the average character or advance in the ethical knowledge of mankind.

In this view there is some truth, but it is so mixed up with error that the total statement is of little worth. That the growth of skepticism, or increasing lack of certainty about transcendental opinions, has had much to do with diminishing religious persecution, is not to be denied. But that the average persecutor is a man whose horrid actions are dictated by an unselfish interest in the welfare of his fellow-men, is a much more questionable proposition. It has not been customary to credit religious bigotry with such lofty motives,—if motives prompting such atrocious actions can at all properly be called lofty,—and we do not find Mr. Buckle disposed to be particularly lenient in his judgment of individual persecutors, whatever general statements the supposed exigencies of his theory may have led him to make. When he comes to treat of the bigoted Scotch divines of the seventeenth century, he is only too ready to charge them with moral perversity as well as with intellectual ignorance and obtuseness. This is very inconsistent; but inconsistency can hardly be avoided when one starts with such a singularly half-true theory as that which Mr. Buckle propounded.

Mr. Buckle's fundamental error lies in the attempt to assign distinct parts to elements of human nature that in reality cannot be separated. For didactic or school-room purposes it is well enough to consider separately the intellectual and moral faculties of man. But when we come to examine concretely any actual group of human phenomena, it is hopelessly futile to try to consider intelligence and moral disposition as working separately, or to assign to each its kind and amount of effects. In point of fact they never do work separately, but their combinations are so manifold and intricate that the disentangling of effects becomes impossible. When we look at things rather than words, we see that every complex question of morals is largely also a question of intelligence, and conversely. For example, let us consider what political economists call the "effective

desire of accumulation." As a rule all men desire to make money, or to increase their general control over the circumstances which make life comfortable or pleasurable; but the effectiveness of this desire is very different with different individuals, and it is immeasurably more effective in the case of civilized men than in the case of barbarians. The savage cannot be made to work to-day in anticipation of wants that are not actually felt at present; but the civilized man will even devote a hundred or a thousand dollars' worth of labor every year to ward off the mere possibility of a loss by fire which is by no means likely to occur. This tendency to provide for future contingencies is at the root of what is called the "effective desire of accumulation," and it furnishes one of the most conspicuous of all the distinctions between civilized men and savages. The progress of mankind in civilization has been to a large extent identical with the growth of this tendency. But, now, how far has this been an intellectual, and how far a moral progress? On the one hand, it may be argued that the ability to labor and to economize to-day in anticipation of future contingencies is an index of self-control or of power to resist momentary temptations; and in so far as this is true, the increase of the "effective desire of accumulation" is an index of the degree to which civilized men have risen morally above the dead level of savagery. But, on the other hand, it is undeniable that such a purely intellectual faculty as imagination has a great deal to do with this ability to anticipate future emergencies. A savage does not work to-day in order to keep the wolf from his door next winter, because he cannot frame in his mind an adequate picture of what next winter is going to be. The temptations of to-day he vividly realizes; but of the needs of next winter he can form no mental image distinct or vivid enough to determine his actions. So with the careless, improvident man—who is to that extent a barbarian—in civilized society. No honest man would ever voluntarily run up a bill, to be paid on the uncertain chances of his income six months hence, if he could adequately represent to himself, in imagination, the discomfort or even misery which after six months the bill is liable to produce. I am not speaking now of such pecuniary obligations as are sometimes thrust upon persons by circumstances over which they have no discoverable means of control. I refer only to such obligations as are commonly incurred in civilized society through

excess of unproductive expenditure, or what is currently known and stigmatized as "extravagance." The results of extravagant expenditure, especially as connected with the system of "living upon credit," form a very large proportion of the miseries by which modern society is afflicted: if all the secrets of society could be laid open for inspection, we should perhaps marvel at the amount of unhappiness which is traceable directly or indirectly to this cause. Yet the reckless assumption of pecuniary obligations does not ordinarily originate in dishonesty of intention. There can be no doubt that it ordinarily originates in mental incapacity to form a distinct and accurate conception of the future results of to-day's actions, coöperating with that comfortable assurance that things will somehow or other come out right, which nearly all men persist in cherishing. The lazy belief that in some unspecified way things will so adjust themselves as to prevent the natural consequences of a wrong or foolish act, is a very common fallacy, upon which George Eliot is especially fond of commenting. This belief, which is responsible for so much imprudence and for so much crime, is itself the product of defects that are partly intellectual and partly moral. It arises partly from a slothfulness of temper which shrinks from the discomfort of dealing with unpleasant facts, and partly from inability to think out complicated relations of cause and effect. Thus deeply and widely inwrought with every phase of the moral power of resisting temptation, is that purely intellectual power which we may call "representativeness"—that is, the power of forming distinct and vivid mental pictures of circumstances which have not yet begun to exist, or are at any rate remote from us at the present moment. Other things equal, the man who has this power of "representativeness" most fully developed is most likely to exhibit self-control amid the myriad temptations of life. Yet in spite of the highly composite character of the process by which the habit of self-control is reached, the result is a purely ethical result—a result which we estimate solely with reference to its bearing upon the welfare of society. And accordingly, when we praise a man for prudence and self-control, we rightly feel that we are paying tribute rather to his moral character than to his intellectual capacity.

Such being the inextricable complication of intellectual and moral processes, even in such a comparatively simple case as that

of "the effective desire of accumulation," we need not expect to be able to deal satisfactorily with such a complex affair as the persecuting spirit without taking into the account both intellectual and moral factors. And in taking both into the account, it must be borne in mind that what we have to say about the one is necessarily incomplete until mentally supplemented by what we have to say about the other.

The diminution in the intensity of the persecuting spirit and the diminution in the atrocity of its manifestations, alike furnish, when duly analyzed, an excellent illustration of the intellectual and moral advance of mankind from a state of bestial savagery toward a state of refined civilization. Let us consider first, for a moment, the diminution in the atrociousness of the overt acts by which the persecuting spirit has manifested itself; and afterward let us proceed more thoroughly into the consideration of the underlying causes of the temper of mind which has led men to persecute one another.

In the lowest stages of human progress which the comparative study of institutions has revealed to us, there are no great political aggregates of men covering large areas of country, supporting themselves by complex and multifarious kinds of industrial activity, and bound together by varied community of interests, guaranteed by laws based on the common consent of all. Viewed in relation to what we now know about the antiquity of the human race, a society like this must be regarded as quite a late and elaborate result of the slow process of civilization. In broad contrast to anything of this sort, we find mankind in their primitive condition—such as we may still find it partially exemplified in the institutions of savage races—existing only in little tribes, supporting themselves almost entirely by predatory occupations quite like those by which bears and tigers support themselves, and perpetually fighting with each other for the possession of the hunting-grounds that insure their means of subsistence. In this primitive bestial state of society, there is nothing like a normal state of peace. The nearest approach to peace is a state of armed truce. Warfare between tribes goes on chronically, the injury which one inflicts upon another being compensated only by some equivalent injury inflicted in revenge. As all the foreign policy of a given tribe may be thus summed up in perpetual murder of men, so its internal industries may be mainly summed up in the perpetual slaughter of animals that serve for food.



Every man is primarily a butcher. To kill something is the prime necessity of life. The direct infliction of death or of physical suffering is the principal daily occupation of all the members of the community; and as a correlative effect of all this, the ability to meet death or to endure physical suffering without flinching is one of the attributes of a hero that society prizes most highly. The most complete instance of a society of this sort that has acquired historic fame is that of the Iroquois of New York, in the seventeenth century. But there is no doubt that, in all the respects we are now considering, our own Aryan ancestors who conquered and settled Europe were substantially like the Iroquois.

Now, in such a state of society as this, it is obvious that men will inflict pain without the smallest compunctions and upon very small provocation. The feelings with which we regard to-day the needless infliction of physical suffering would be utterly unintelligible to them. To such men death and torture are common incidents of life, which no more interrupt the even tenor of their ways than ours are interrupted by railway accidents. A man born in such a state of society *expects* to meet a violent death, as is shown by our own Norse progenitors, who regarded it as disgraceful to die in one's bed,—and an end which a man was willing to encounter himself he might readily be supposed to be willing to inflict upon others. In this way, I think, the excessive cruelty which characterized the persecutions of the Middle Ages is completely explained. When we read of the frightful tortures inflicted upon Arabs, Jews, and Protestants by the Inquisition; when we remember the fiendish outrages perpetrated by the Spanish armies in Holland and by the Imperial armies at Magdeburg; when we recollect that in Spain an *auto-da-fe* was one of the most imposing ceremonies of the Church, and that, on the marriage of Philip II., burning heretics served as nuptial torches, we are at first inclined to exclaim that such cruelties could never have been. In human nature, as we know it to-day, mean and bad as it too often is, we do not seem to find anything like a parallel to such horrible cruelty as this. It has been said that we need but to imagine the state of mind which attributed a similar course of action to Eternal Justice, and conceived it as part and parcel of the essential order of the universe, to render all this explicable. No doubt the self-same ingenuity which men displayed speculatively in theological descriptions of the next

world, was also displayed practically in such inventions as the rack and the boot, the Virgin armed with knives, or the cell whose walls gradually approached each other and crushed the wretched prisoner into a jelly. It is significant, too, that execution by fire was openly defended as being symbolical of the everlasting punishment destined for the heretic hereafter. At the execution of the lad, William Hunter, in 1555, as the fagots were set on fire one of the attendant priests exclaimed, "Behold, as thou burnest here, so shalt thou burn in hell!"

To cite the atrocious theology, however, as the sufficient explanation of the atrocious behavior, would be, I think, to invert the relations of cause and effect,—in homely phrase, to get the cart before the horse. It was only in a cruel age that the doctrine of hell-fire could have acquired that hold upon men's minds which it had acquired in the Middle Ages. In recent times the doctrine has become almost universally discredited throughout the more enlightened portions of Christendom. Even those who maintain a belief in some kind of endless punishment, no longer insist literally upon the lake of brimstone and the fire that is never quenched. Now, the doctrine of hell-fire has become thus universally discredited, not because it has been scientifically disproved, for science has neither data nor methods whereby to disprove such a doctrine; nor because it has been exegetically shown to be unsupported by Scripture, for the ingenuity of orthodox exegesis has always been equal to the task of making Scripture mean whatever is required; it has been discredited simply because people have become milder in their manners and less used to enduring and inflicting physical pain. The doctrine shocks people's feelings, and so they refuse to believe it, no matter how the logic of the case may stand. The sermons of Theodore Parker on the popular theology well illustrate the change of mood that has come over men's minds with reference to the justice of God: the whole burden of these discourses is the argument that the infliction of endless suffering on the creature is incompatible with infinite justice on the part of the Creator. That such an argument appears sound to-day, whereas it would have seemed absurd to the contemporaries of Luther, is due to the self-same widening and deepening of human sympathies that have put an end to slavery and to judicial torture, that have done away with the horrors of Bedlam and the "stone-hold" of Newgate, and that have embodied in the Constitution of the United

States the injunction that "cruel and unusual punishment" must not be inflicted upon criminals.

Now, this general increase in humanity which is discernible throughout the most advanced regions of Christendom during the past three centuries, and which has become especially conspicuous in our own time, is undoubtedly consequent upon the vast increase of industrial at the expense of military activity which has characterized the same period. With the gradual aggregation of men into great and stable communities, and with the accompanying increase in the complexity of social life and in the number of wants which labor is required to satisfy, the sphere of industry has become immensely enlarged and the sphere of warfare has become correspondingly restricted. I do not forget that great and terrible wars still occur, but it remains none the less true that fighting has ceased to be recognized as the principal, or even as a very considerable, part of the business of society. Private warfare, once universal and incessant throughout Western Europe, has become extinct, and in the Northern States of the American Union it has never existed. Brigandage survives only in out-of-the-way corners of the most backward countries of Christendom, such as Spain and Sicily, or else in localities where civilization comes into geographical contact with barbarism, as in Thessaly and Albania, or on the extreme western frontiers of our own country. Dueling has become nearly obsolete, and is dealt with as a crime, while the so-called code of honor upon which it thrived has become an object of general derision. The sword is no longer a part of a gentleman's wardrobe, and laws are framed to prevent the carrying of daggers and pistols. Only soldiers on parade and sportsmen nowadays carry deadly weapons openly. While the sportsmanship, moreover, which simply inflicts death on bird or beast is still held in esteem, emphatic protests are made against the sportsmanship which wantonly inflicts pain, as we have seen in the controversy about fox-hunting between Mr. Freeman and Mr. Trollope. Organized societies exist for the protection of domestic animals against cruel treatment. Even where it is necessary to inflict pain for the purpose of preserving life, as in the profession of the surgeon, we do all in our power, by the use of anæsthetics, to reduce the pain to a minimum. And even where it is necessary to inflict death as a means of protection to life, as in the execution of murderers, the dreadful work

is done as gently as possible, and is kept hidden from the gaze of the public.

It has thus come to pass that, in such communities as England and our own Northern States, the majority of individuals may live all their lives without ever being called upon to take part in putting a fellow-creature to death. Most of us, I presume, have never witnessed a violent death, and know of such things only by hearsay—only by reading the newspapers and books of history. The consequence is that a kind of feminine softness has come over our tempers—a tenderness which shrinks from the very thought of death and suffering purposely inflicted as intolerable. In military ages any approach to such softness of temper was stigmatized as unmanly, and such a type of character could not flourish, because it was unsuited to the conditions of life in a perpetually belligerent community; but in our own industrial age this mild type of character is fostered by all the potency of public approval. But it is not only by restricting the sphere of warfare that our complex industrial civilization has nourished a temper that shrinks from the infliction of pain. Productive activity has operated in this way directly, as well as indirectly, through restraining destructive activity. Social life has lost the half-brutal, half-ascetic aspect befitting ages when life was for high and low little more than a struggle for existence. It is a trite remark that the American laborer to-day possesses many physical comforts which a medieval king was unable to secure. Throughout the greater part of civilized society, the struggle nowadays is not for the bare means of subsistence, but for the attainment of a certain amount of elegance and luxury. The contrast is great between the medieval baron who, in time of peace, had no resources but in hunting or in tournaments, or in getting drunk, and the modern citizen with his theater and opera, his lectures and concerts, his novels and magazines lying on the table, his houseful of pictures and bric-à-brac, his hours of work at his office or in the stock-exchange, relieved by the quiet domestic enjoyment of the evening. Accustomed to all this complicated comfort, our growing tendency to shrink from needlessly encountering with what is disagreeable is still further enhanced, and this tendency produces a visible effect upon our manners. Whatever savors of personal contention, whatever is liable to wound the feelings or disgust the senses, is peremptorily proscribed in the usages of polite society. Compared with English

and American gentlemen of to-day, the gentlemen of Shakespeare's plays talked like boors or ruffians.

The diminution in the atrociousness of persecution, then, is simply one among a hundred illustrations of the change in men's tempers that has been wrought by the change in men's occupations which has characterized the growth of modern society. From being predominantly warlike and predatory, human activity has come to be predominantly pacific and industrial, and out of this change have grown our milder beliefs as well as our milder manners.

We have not yet, however, got to the bottom of the matter. We have accounted for the decrease in the cruelty with which the persecuting spirit has manifested itself, but we have now to consider the underlying causes of the temper of mind which has led men to persecute one another; we have to show, in particular, how it is that, so far as all matters of religious belief are concerned, the persecuting spirit has already greatly diminished in intensity, and will no doubt eventually become extinct among civilized men. We shall find that the change is deeply inwrought with the progress of mankind, both morally and intellectually.

The persecuting spirit has its origin *morally* in the disposition of man to domineer over his fellow-creatures, *intellectually* in the assumption that one's own opinions are infallibly correct. We know very well how children are apt to behave when arguing some question of no great consequence. Their little passions warming with the discussion, they pass from argument to abuse, they call each other hard names, and, at last, they begin to pound each other. Most people, I imagine, must have had experiences of this sort in their childhood. I recollect, when quite a little boy, coming to blows with a school-mate over the question whether Napoleon really won the battle of Eylau. As I came off best in the scrimmage, and as the affair is a quarter of a century old, I am ready to confess that I fought on the wrong side,—the battle of Eylau was not much of a victory, after all! Now the spirit which prompts a child to pound his companion who resists him in argument is identical with the spirit which prompts a man to calumniate, torture, burn, or otherwise put down and injure his neighbor who refuses to reverence the things which he, himself, deems sacred. The more we reflect upon it the more we shall be convinced that at bottom the feeling is the same in the two cases, though in the latter it is accompanied and disguised by

other feelings. Now, what is this feeling but the disposition to *domineer*, to assert one's own personality at the expense of neighboring personalities,—a disposition eminently characteristic of the brute and of the savage, but less and less characteristic of man as he becomes more and more civilized? Bearing this in mind, and remembering the fable of the wolf and the lamb—remembering that a strong passion is never at a loss for reasons, and that no one is more thoroughly the dupe of the false reasons than the man himself who is under the control of the strong passion—remembering this, one has the key to a large part of the history of persecution. The paradox, as regards the “benevolent persecutors,” is a paradox no longer. It becomes explicable how a man may sincerely believe himself to be doing God's service, while he is in reality obeying an impulse which, in an ultimate analysis, is neither more nor less than the impulse to domineer over one's fellow-creatures. Thus, though the plea of mistaken benevolence may now and then be properly urged in extenuation of certain special acts of persecution, it cannot excuse persecution, or obscure the fact that its diminution is largely due to a slow moral progress,—to a decrease in self-assertion, and a concomitant increase in respect for the rights of other people.

Very closely connected with this moral root of the persecuting spirit in mere arrogant self-assertion is its intellectual root, in the assumption that one's own opinions are infallible. That persecution can have no theoretical basis or justification, save on the assumption that somebody's opinions are infallibly true, has been so thoroughly illustrated by Mr. Mill in his beautiful essay on “Liberty,” that I need not dwell here upon this part of the subject. It behooves us, however, to consider in what ways the progress of civilization has contributed to weaken the spirit of self-assertion and the assumption of infallibility.

Obviously, the disposition to domineer over others, to assert one's own personality at the expense of others, is simply one particular phase of the disposition to kill one's enemies which characterizes human society in its primeval stages of development. It is a temper of mind which was favored by the general condition of things when there were no political aggregates larger than simple tribes which were chronically at war with one another. What I have said above, in considering the effects upon the atrocity of persecution of the substitution of a normal state of peace for a normal state of warfare, will also apply to the present case.

The disposition to domineer over your fellow-man—to make him obey you or assent to your opinions, whether he will or no—is only an evanescent phase of the disposition to kill him if he interferes in any way with the accomplishment of your purposes in life. The very same diminution in the sphere of military activity, attendant upon the aggregation of men into great and complex political societies, which we found to explain the decreasing atrocity of persecution, explains also the decreasing vitality of its moral foundation in the disposition to domineer over one's fellow-men.

The weakening of the assumption of infallibility in one's own opinions is manifestly a consequence of the same set of coöperating causes. When one's life is extremely simple and monotonous, consisting of very few experiences that are perpetually repeated; when one is not often compelled to test the validity of one's own conclusions by comparing them with the different conclusions which other people draw from the same data; when one lives amid a certain group of beliefs, customs, and observances that are never brought into comparison (save, perhaps, in exterminating warfare) with other differing groups;—under such conditions as these it is noticeable that one's opinions are formed with great promptness, and when once formed are unchangeable. These are the conditions under which the opinions of savages are formed, and the chief characteristic in the opinions of savages is their wonderful rigidity; you can no more change them than you could teach a fox, when chased by the hunter, to climb a tree like a cat. Or, consider the case of an ignorant woman, in the lower classes of civilized society. Her opinions about men and things are formed in an instant, by some mental process of which she can render no account, and when once formed are utterly impervious to fact or to argument. She acts on the tacit assumption that she is infallible, precisely as the savage acts. To think of hesitating for a moment and questioning the validity of their opinions, is something which never happens to either of them.

This is the obstinate fashion in which men used to cling to their opinions in that crude state of social development in which each little society was at war with every other, and in which, accordingly, it was impossible to bring a given set of opinions into free contact with another set, within the limits of one and the same society. As men have gradually been brought together into great and complex societies, as their opinions have been

brought more and more into the focus of a common point of comparison, this rigidity of the mental processes—so like the rigidity of the mental processes of the lower animals—has gradually yielded to circumstances such as favor flexibility. With the case of the savage or the woman who comes to scrub the floor, contrast the case of the scientific philosopher, whose opinions are slowly formed after a long and careful weighing of conflicting evidences, and when once formed are held subject to perpetual revision and modification. On considering these two contrasted cases, it becomes obvious how the aggregation of men into great and complex societies, bringing with it increased variety of experience and increased knowledge of the manifold liability to error, has operated to destroy the confident assumption of infallibility which characterizes the bigot and the savage.

We have now made out, I think, a very fair explanation of the way in which the persecuting spirit has been affected by the general progress of human society. But one of the deepest considerations of all still remains to be treated.

In the early stages of society, as illustrated by such writers as Sir Henry Maine, the *unit* of society is not the *individual*, but the *family* or *clan*. In a tribe of primitive savages there is no such thing as individual rights or individual obligations. It is the tribe as a whole that incurs obligations and asserts its rights as far as it is concerned with adjacent tribes. Amid the pressing interests of the tribe, in the fierce struggle for existence, the individual has no chance whatever for especial consideration. The traces of this state of things confront us continually as we study ancient history, where no fact is more conspicuous than the utterly ruthless way in which the individual is sacrificed to the state. The bearing of this state of things upon the history of persecution goes farther than anything else toward explaining that dreadful history. In the early stages of society, when only small political aggregates have been formed, and when each little aggregate is perpetually struggling for its life with adjacent aggregates, the only kind of responsibility known to the tribe is corporate responsibility. The tribe, as a whole, is held to be responsible corporately for the acts of each of its members, and hence it is necessary that the acts and beliefs of every one of the members should be subject to the approval of the tribe. If any one individual does something that is displeasing to the gods, the whole tribe is liable to be punished for the misdeed of this one



person. This feeling was universal in ancient society, and, until we realize how intense it was, we shall be unable to understand some of the most remarkable scenes of ancient history. Take, for example, the frantic excitement which was stirred up in Athens, just before the expedition against Syracuse, by the mutilation of the rude way-side statues of Hermes. It is impossible for a modern man to understand this furious excitement unless he duly considers the fact that, in the minds of the Athenians, the whole community—and not merely the individual criminals concerned—was responsible to the gods for this outrage. The whole community might be visited by the angry gods with famine and plague because of the misdeeds of a few graceless members of the community.

This intense feeling of corporate responsibility pervades all the life of ancient society, and by keeping it in mind we shall understand many occurrences in ancient history which without this key we should find incomprehensible. When we bethink ourselves how far such deeply rooted feelings propagate themselves in history, we shall be inclined, I think, to find in this sense of corporate responsibility the weightiest cause of those deeds of persecution which have made history hideous. To remove the heretic, lest God curse us all for his sake,—this no doubt has been the feeling that, more than any other, has justified the use of racks and thumb-screws.

But with the progress of society toward wider and wider political aggregation, and toward greater and greater political stability,—along with the growing complexity of industrial processes, and along with the partial elimination of warfare,—there has slowly grown up a feeling that it is the individual, and not the tribe or the society, that is ultimately responsible for the individual's opinions on matters of religion. Whatever we may think to-day about the results or the method of Colonel Ingersoll, we certainly do not entertain the dread that because of Colonel Ingersoll's opinions, or because of his bold manner of expressing them, we are in danger of a famine, a plague, or a civil war next year. The aggregation of small communities into great nations, and the growing complexity of the industrial processes by which great nations are sustained, have entirely obliterated in our minds the recollection of the kinds of belief and the kinds of moral obligation which characterized the primitive tribal communities. The phase of feeling characteristic of the primitive community showed

itself all through the Middle Ages, and was mainly responsible for the atrocities which have made the memory of the Middle Ages hideous. The beginnings of modern history, as distinguished from this mere perpetuation of primeval ideas, were signalized by the revolt of Luther against the doctrine of corporate responsibility for opinion, and against the assumption of infallibility on the part of a given body of men.

JOHN FISKE.